

INTRODUCTION

Approach as near as possible to Constantinople and India. Whoever governs there will be the true sovereign of the world. Consequently, excite continual wars not only in Turkey but in Persia. Establish dockyards on the Black Sea; seize upon little pieces near this sea as well as on the Baltic \which is doubly necessary for the attainment of our project. And in the decadence of Persia penetrate as far as the Persian Gulf: re-establish if it be possible, the ancient commerce with the Levant; advance as far as India, which is the depot of the world. Arrived at this point, we shall have no longer need of England's gold.³

The fact that Iran was considered the "Suez Canal of the revolution" did not in itself solve the strategic problems of the Communist advance. The Bolshevik revolution began in the north and center of the Russian Empire. It had first to assert itself in the Empire's outlying and non-Russian districts before reaching Iran's frontiers. Between revolutionary Russia and Iran was a belt of territory inhabited by Moslems, which had to be conquered first. It is in these areas, comprising the Caucasian region, Transcaspia, and Turkestan, that the Soviet concepts of national self-determination and revolutionary emancipation had to meet their first test. It is here also that the Bolshevik and the British interests clashed for the first time in the Middle East. The drama of Russia's border regions was instructive to the Moslem world and especially to the Moslem peoples adjacent to Russia. This drama is strictly linked to the further events in Iran. It will be useful, therefore, to recapitulate briefly its salient features before embarking upon the study of Iran herself.

³ The entire will of Peter the Great is reproduced by P. M. Sykes, *History of*

Persia (ad eel.; London, 1921), II, 244.